CrossRef is a not-for-profit membership association whose mission is to enable easy identification and use of trustworthy electronic content by promoting the cooperative development and application of a sustainable infrastructure.

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Among the visitors to the Frankfurt Book Fair in October of 1999 who witnessed the demonstration of the DOI-X project, there were several representatives of the leading scientific, technical, and medical publishers. Recognizing that this prototype of a lookup system based on the Digital Object Identifier (DOI) held the key to a broad-based and efficient journal reference linking system, they took the unusual step of joining together as the non-profit, independent Publishers International Linking Association Inc. (PILA), which was incorporated in January 2000 and CrossRef went live as the first collaborative reference linking service in June 2000.

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